

# Description, Rationale, Instructional Moves, and References for Visual Representations (Graphic Organizers)

## ***Description***

Visual representations (graphic organizers) are tools to help students organize their understanding and recall of important ideas in the areas of vocabulary development and comprehension.

Visual representations (graphic organizers) help students focus on concepts and how they are related to other concepts. They help students read to learn from informational text in the content area and help students see how concepts fit common text structures.

Visual Representations (graphic organizers) are easily transferable across disciplines and are part of the assessment and self-assessment process of learning.

According to Margaret Egan (1999),

A graphic organizer is a visual representation of knowledge, a way of structuring information, and of arranging essential aspects of an idea or topic into a pattern using labels (Bromley, Irwin-DeVitis, & Modlo, 1995). Flood and Lapp (1988) use the term 'mapping' generally to describe any illustrative material that helps children learn from texts. These materials could include charts, graphs, maps, flowcharts, or other structures that help one visualize the materials in texts. Essentially, the terms graphic organizer and mapping are used interchangeably to describe a similar instructional activity.

There is little need to dispute the viability of graphic organizers in classroom instruction. Their use is widespread, and the benefits of effective use are applauded on all levels of learning (Alvermann, 1986; Bromley et al., 1995; Friend & Bursuck, 1999; Heimlich & Pittleman, 1986; Murray & McGlone, 1997; Pearson & Spiro, 1982; Reutzel & Fawson, 1989).

## ***Rationale***

- The use of visual representations allows students to think about and recall knowledge (Hyrle, 2000).
- Studies have shown that teachers primarily present new knowledge to students linguistically. They talk to students about new content or have them read about the new content (Flounder, 1970).
- Instructional activities that allow for a visual display of words and promote students' comparing and contrasting of new words to known words can be beneficial means for increasing their vocabulary knowledge (W. Rupley, J.



Hogan, W. Nichols, 1998/1999).

- Visual representations (graphic organizers) enhance the readers acquisition of new knowledge (Ausubel, 1960).
- Visual representations (graphic organizers) provide an overview of material to be learned, a reference point for putting new vocabulary and main ideas into orderly patterns, a cue for important information, a visual stimulus for written and verbal information, and a concise review tool (Hawk, 1986).
- Visual representations (graphic organizers) suggest that the effects upon comprehension are increased when visual representations (graphic organizers) are constructed by the students as during a reading or post-reading activity and not a worksheet to be completed (Alvermann & Boothby, 1986).
- Visual representations (graphic organizers) illustrate concepts and interrelationships among concepts in a text, using diagrams or other pictorial devices (Put Reading First).
- Visual representations (graphic organizers) help students focus on text structures as they read (Trabasso & Bouchard).
- Visual representations (graphic organizers) provide students with tools that they can use to examine and visually represent relationships in a text (Trabasso & Bouchard).
- Visual representations (graphic organizers) help readers learn text structures, focus on concepts and relationships between concepts, construct tools to represent text relationships visually, and assist in writing well-organized summaries (Trabasso & Bouchard).
- Graphic organizers are particularly useful for helping student recognize and identify text structure. Story maps help students recognize the structure of narrative text (Almasi, 2003).

### ***Rationale for Using Graphic Organizers with Nonfiction Text Structures***

- Graphic organizers serve a similar purpose in that they help focus students' attention to the manner in which text is organized while they read. Indeed, a critical aspect in the use of graphic organizers is to teach students that they can be used as a tool to facilitate awareness of text structure while reading. Often graphic organizers are completed as a post-reading activity. When used in this manner, they act more as an assessment than a tool to facilitate the comprehension process. Graphic organizers are particularly useful for helping students recognize and identify text structure. Story maps help students recognize the structure of narrative text. As students encounter the various story grammar elements while reading, they record them on the story map. This visual aid helps students anticipate the type of information they will encounter while reading, and it helps them organize the incoming information as they read. Such organization facilitates easy access, which enhances recall and comprehension.
- Teaching Text Structures through Visual Organizers:

Almasi, 2002.

Three factors are required if teachers are to successfully teach children about text structures. First, teachers must be knowledgeable about each structure. They must analyze texts in order to develop questions that focus students' understanding of the structure. Second, they must select passages that clearly illustrate each text pattern. Third, they must teach students a strategy that they can actively use while they read, such as completing a visual organizer (McGee & Richgels, 1992).

Visual organizers can help learners understand and retain essential information found in a text. They sensitize students to the structure of a text by providing a visual representation of that structure. As students learn to use and construct visual organizers, they gain control of strategies that can help them identify important information as well as recognize interrelationships among ideas.

Moss, 2002.

## ***Instructional Moves***

### **Suggested Steps for Modeling the Use of a Story Map Graphic Organizer**

1. Select a story that clearly illustrates the common story elements such as plot, characters, setting, problem, resolution, and theme.
2. Read the story or book (the book can be read orally by the teacher or independently by the student).
3. As the elements of the story are discussed and identified, model how to simplify the descriptions and write them in the appropriate places on the map.

*Note: Discussion about the decisions for each story element is essential to this strategy.*

### **Instructional Sequence for Introducing Text Structure and Graphic Organizers**

1. Introduce the pattern and explain when authors might use it. Note cue words that signal the pattern. Point out, however, that authors sometimes hint at these patterns rather than using signal words to indicate them directly.
2. Share an example of a paragraph that demonstrates the pattern as well as a graphic organizer. Read the paragraph together. Ask students to identify signal words in the paragraph.
3. Distribute copies of an appropriate graphic organizer. Place a copy of the organizer on the overhead projector. Assist students in completing the organizer as a group.
4. Involve students in analyzing examples of the pattern in trade books. Children can examine a variety of trade books to identify the structure being studied. Some of these books will clearly signal the pattern through headings or signal words, whereas others do not. Students can diagram the structure using a graphic organizer.



5. Engage student in writing texts reflective of each structure.

Moss, 2002.

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